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Making Sense of Nonsense

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Making Sense of Nonsense

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Art

by

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Abstract

A paradox of simultaneous sincerity and humor, *Making Sense of Nonsense* attempts to identify deficient systems upon which we rely daily. Systems of logic, text, and visual language are all rife with flaws solely because their source--humankind--is irrevocably bound to error. This is not to say that these systems cannot be improved; on the contrary, a rigorous investigation of these systems allows one insight into their mechanics to the end that one endlessly questions the very foundation of the mode of communication being used. Materials and discarded objects such as vintage tools, automotive parts, spray paint, string, furniture, plastic, S&M ephemera, and glitter merge into unsteady structures that hint at new narratives of their functionality, or lack thereof.

Questioning realms of visual and verbal language, aesthetics, and functionality are fundamental to this exhibition as they are constantly discussed, edited, and revised by theorists, critics, artists, and the audience. This line of questioning permits my practice to be endless; allowing me to constantly shift and adjust to accommodate contemporaneity. *Making Sense of Nonsense* recognizes the process of attempting to solve a puzzle that cannot be solved, despite the illusion of resolution, which indicates that the answer is never absolute. Rather, it endlessly evolves.

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Personal Background

I was born and raised in Southern California surrounded by cars, music, and art. Music in particular played a hefty role in my formation as a human being. My parents both loved the Blues, Classic Rock (by the standards of the 1990s), and Jazz; yet, I fell in love with Metal partly as an act of rebellion, partly as an evolution of discourse (in the sense that I felt the next progression in virtuosity was distortion and odd time signatures), and ultimately as an amalgamation of the three genres with vocals used as an instrument through distortion. Metal bands such as Between The Buried And Me, Meshuggah, and Periphery all use Blues progressions distressed through complex layering of instruments and vocal distortion to transform the voice into another melodic layer. The combination of strategies and genres is an idea that I employ within my work.

My awareness of the revered history and potency of art combined with a vehement annoyance with the consumability of pop culture results in work that is dissatisfied with, but still cognizant of how to function under Western values. This is to say that after nine years in higher education, studying art/the art world, and being the product of an entirely capitalistic metropolitan environment, I am aware of the commodification of the object, particularly the inescapability of the art object from the realm of the commodity,¹ and the social/political/economic power that is inherent within those objects. My distaste of the majority of pop culture stems from the barrage of vapid information and lazy tactics to persuade the consumer to consume products that possess the ever-valuable quality of planned obsolescence; things that are convenient, in style, or status symbols are being pushed instead of things that are made to last generations, things that are actually meaningful to not just the consumer, but those

¹ Joshua Simon, "Neo-Materialism, Part One: The Commodity and the Exhibition," *E-Flux Journal* 20 (2010): accessed February 27, 2017, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/20/67643/neo-materialism-part-i-the-commodity-and-the-exhibition/>

close to them. Pop culture is represented in my work through resin, which has a history of consumability and mass production as it is traditionally used to cast plastic versions of original objects. Resin is used to coat, mask, and consume the vintage or antiquated objects, rendering them as foundational building blocks for this formless material to dominate.

Building model cars, modifying and refurbishing home stereo amplifiers, kart racing, playing guitar, and making art were all points of interest as I was younger because of the fact that they are dominantly learned through experience. Physically acting upon objects and paying attention to how and why I manipulate those objects (such as instruments, cars, and second-hand things) has carried through in my methodologies. Amplifiers have an additional layer in my personal experiences because they were always from someone I did not know -- the karts and guitars were things that I knew the origin of, while the amplifiers were purchased from someone through eBay -- which has resurfaced in my recent works because of their unknown histories; this idea of not knowing the original life of the object is further discussed in the Conceptual Framework and Methodology chapter.

Formal Analysis

Tension and scale are used to create a relationship with unity or pattern; of course everything can be taken to extremes to become more impactful, but the influence of scale and tension is greater than that of other principles when taken to excessive ends. Visual and physical tension creates anxiety concerning the well-being of the object in question. Grand scale imposes itself, displaying the insignificance of humans by towering over us with a sort of supreme monumentality. Small scale, on the other hand, invites the viewer to indulge in an intimate conversation with the piece; it makes the viewer feel as though they are the only one currently interacting with the piece, a sense of importance in viewership. Artists such as Richard Serra have taken advantage of both principles at varied levels of extremity with *Corner Prop*; the lead rod wedged between the floor and a lead cube propped into the corner six feet off the ground has a sense of monumentality and palpable tension. In *Making Sense of Nonsense*, works vary from the intimate to the monumental; both ends of the spectrum in terms of scale inhabit the same space with the most monumental against the back wall, lit like an altar, giving the show a sense of dramatism -- a crescendo towards a climax of sorts. This does not mean that I make installations as I am not transforming the space itself, but rather that I am conducting the ways in which the space is being occupied through careful placement of individual sculptures. The intimate works line the walls while human-sized works stand freely throughout the space, making one consider the relation to the objects surrounding them: the larger, the smaller, and the equal. This strategy differs from that of Serra and his Prop pieces in two ways. First, the works in *Making Sense of Nonsense* are not “trying to make the volume of the space tangible, so that it is immediately, physically, by your body...”² as Serra’s Prop Pieces were; these works are bringing

² “Prop,” Walker Art Center, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.walkerart.org/collections/artworks/prop>

attention to the familiar through recontextualization and abstraction. Second, the use of tension in *Making Sense of Nonsense* is not that of connection to the space itself or volume. Rather, their tension is one of containment within each piece, of binding, wrapping, and tying. Surface is used to seduce the viewer, to draw them in and bask in its presence, admiring the clean lines and rich, vivid color. Conversely, the surface of an object can be grotesque and cause visceral reactions. The usage of the shimmering colors and glitter to create a theatrical visceral quality to evoke thoughts of the bodily, the viscous, the fluid, the gestural. However, in all of these cases, a conflict is created to evoke viscerally conflicted objects or finishes of desire and the grotesque.

I more often than not saturate my resin with color in order to give it the depth that I desire. This desire stems from a history of going to automotive shows from the 1990's to the early 2000's and being blinded by the twinkle and seduced by the depth of the finishes of the vehicles. It was as if the cars were made of perfectly fit panels of color rather than coated with it; like they were color all the way through, even though they were coated in a fraction of an inch of colored enamel, metal flake, and clear gloss. Dave Hickey phrases this effect beautifully in his book *Air Guitar*:

“...while we were talking about cars and art, Luis explained to me that his earliest ideas of becoming an artist had come from watching the glimmering lowriders cruising the streets of Juarez and El Paso. They seemed to him, he said, the ultimate synthesis of painting and sculpture--the ultimate accommodation of solidity and translucency--and more importantly, for Luis, they seemed a bridge between the past and the future because he recognized the visual language of the Baroque in these magical automobiles, in the way the smooth folds of steel and the hundreds of coats of transparent lacquer caught the light and held it as the cars slipped through the bright streets like liquid color--like Caravaggio meets Bernini, on wheels.”³

Granted, Hickey was talking about the finishes of 1950's-1970's hot rods, but those effects have only been amplified with more intense hues, pearlescents, fluorescents, and flakes over the

³ Dave Hickey, “The Birth of the Big, Beautiful Art Market,” in *Air Guitar* (Los Angeles: Art issues. Press, 1997), 69.

decades. That seduction of automotive paint is what I recreate with pours of glitter-impregnated, colorant-laden gloss resin that creates the illusion that the surface *is* color, through and through, rather than applied color. In a similar way to how John McCracken applied resin to objects so that they would appear to be only color, I coat constructs of found objects in resin to create surfaces that both give the illusion that the surface is the object and gives away that the surface is applied to an object. These vibrant colors contrast with the weathered, worn, rusted, and beaten objects that are partially coated in them; sometimes the resin is thin, allowing the aged character of the object to be visible through a glaze of bright, fresh color; other times the resin is thick to the point of opacity, leaving no trace of the surface of the object, but completely dominating it with a plastic protective layer, in which case the history of the object is simultaneously protected and hidden from the viewer and the elements. Due to the fact that the objects are being preserved and repurposed essentially for eternity, their functions and histories are rendered moot in relation to form, which is further discussed in the Methodologies and Conceptual Framework chapter under the discussion on spectrality.

The texture of this sensual color is usually glass smooth, but on occasion it wrinkles like skin, flowing and pulling at itself underneath a semi-rigid surface. Smooth flowing lines and forms are little more than the quality of resin in general, though, I do intervene with the material when a drip is superfluous or should stick to the form rather than hang freely. There are two dominant factors in deciding the final forms of the works: one is the structural stability of the how the objects in the composition fit together, and the other is how dramatic or tense they can be. This methodology of making is based in the idea of informed intuition that Barry Schwabsky

states about the works/practice of Rachel Harrison: “...when intuition and intelligence are one and the same, it all comes naturally.”⁴

Visual and physical continuity take place regularly in most of my work. Lines are drawn amongst objects with yarn, rope, string, resin, paint, straps, and alignment. In the piece *Guaranteed 5 Years* (fig. 3), the oil can is physically connected to the honey dipper via a flow of deep blue-green with fine gold glitter shimmering in the light, drawing the eye of the viewer from a semi-stable base up a rusty can to the action of dripping gold flecked viscous liquid. Throughout the show, works interact with, point to, yearn for, and ignore each other. For example, *EH* (fig. 4) aims its extremity towards *Good night, sweet prince* (fig. 2), envying the stability and efficiency of its resin-only stand. *It's a flashlight, NOT a vibrator* (fig. 5) snootily faces away from the entrance of the gallery, as though it has no desire to be displayed, but has no qualms with being gawked at.

My works are read hierarchically when in a stack (especially in regards works like *Guaranteed 5 Years* (fig. 3) where a small sculpture sits atop a monumental shrine like structure composed of sawhorses and trunks), and linearly when horizontal. I use these methods of reading art because I am trying to decipher and make sense of the forms in my view. This happens because I quite literally read the work from left to right, right to left, top to bottom, or bottom to top. All too rarely do I read work outside of those parameters, and yet that is how I construct my works: not from left to right, or top to bottom, or even from one directly connected object to another; rather, they are non-linear in build and read--amoebic even. What I mean by this is that as I construct the works, I temporarily ignore the history of the objects and focus solely on the forms and how they can come together as a complex and enticing composition. When disparate

⁴ Barry Schwabsky, “Hubbub and Stillness: The 2009 Venice Biennale,” in *The Perpetual Guest: Art In The Unfinished Present* (London, New York: Verso, 2016), 180.

objects of easy recognition are placed in close proximity to or contact with one another, regardless of the specificity of the history of the individual objects at hand, associative connections are going to be made among them. Objects of significant meaning hold priority in this deciphering, but the unfamiliar brings forth the closest thing that could be considered similar. This deduction is where the complexity and enticement lies for me. In the piece *The spitting image of my father* (fig. 6), composed of a spittoon, an angel candle snifter, broken glasses fixed with a rubber band, a California Raisinette, and an uneven but visceral application of bright green resin filled with fine gold glitter brings forth many different connotations, especially considering the myriad histories that viewers bring to works. *The spitting image of my father* (fig. 6) is the only piece in this body of work that has a title that directly connects my life to the sculpture itself; this is done so that there is an uncertainty of the personal links to each piece. Are they all personal? Are none of them personal? Is the background of the artist crucial in reading these works?

To place the materiality of my works in relation to someone like Jessica Stockholder, whereas she references the associations of the object while focusing on the ubiquity of the plastic readymade and materiality to create a formal composition that inspires thought of the connections between them, I differ slightly by focusing on the associations that the viewer has with objects that have been synchronously preserved and destroyed under a veneer of plastic while keeping in mind the purpose of their juxtapositions among other recognizable things. In terms of the objects that I acquire and how they differ from the disparate and colorful materials of Stockholder, I specifically look for objects that are heavily loaded with semiotic information (such as an ironing board, a trunk/footlocker, or a ladder) and are thus easily readable to a majority of people. Within my work, objects are abstracted via spray paint, resin pours, and the

recontextualization of them with other objects of disparate origins. The unknown history of the objects -- their mystery, their seduction -- is emphasized by spray paint, glitter, liquid color, and composition.

The objects all relate to one another if by no other means than continuity, but that is not to say that they relate directly, or that they do not relate to other objects in other sculptures placed within the same room by virtue of proximity or repetition of color and material. Pieces like *Pencil Dick* (fig. 1) and *Is the plural of abacus “abacuses” or “abaci”?* (fig. 7) both have a pair of shoes upon the feet of a ladder and an iron board, respectively. This commonality along with their close proximity strengthens their relationship to one another. With the triptych of wall works *Night bright* (fig. 8), *The key to the city* (fig. 9), and *Spritz* (fig. 10) the puddles of resin that are held against the wall are all the result of pours on other works throughout the show, subtly referencing each other so that certain colors are familiar on a subconscious level.

Four of the wall pieces are backed by graffiti covered canvases shaped to address the forms that they frame: *Vaguely Texas* (fig. 11), *Everlast* (fig. 12), *Grasp* (fig. 13), and *Grate* (fig. 14). The shape of each canvas is dictated by the form of the object it backs; did it need balance, contrast, repetition? The color of the graffiti that covers the canvas has direct ties to the sculptures in the show as a whole for it was once the dropcloth where objects were prepared for assembly in my studio. Graffiti has always been illegible to me, it is just forms of color giving character to a wall in an alley or an abandoned building. Growing up in Los Angeles, I saw it everywhere, but it was just aesthetic to me. However, graffiti is a form of ownership--a mostly permanent claim to property by defacement. When this claim to ownership is transferred to an object that is easily movable, it nulls the effect of permanent possession and lets it claim only itself.

Methodologies and Conceptual Framework

The idea of intelligent intuition is at the core of my making process. The notion that intuition is outside of conscious reasoning is something that I cannot abide; reason and intuition are not mutually exclusive, they can, and often do, interact with each other. Informed intuition boils down to familiarity, experience, and exposure; much in the same way that a Jazz musician can improvise proficiently, one can learn to intuitively create with proficiency. The argument for intuition is also supported in the book *Failure*: “A work executed according to a plan would be no more than an illustration of a hypothetical construct of art which exists even without the works.”⁵ Granted, the extremist view of this is that planning anything renders it superfluous to act out, but the essence of it is that intuition is a method by which we can access information that would not necessarily be attainable otherwise. The subconscious comes to the fore with this process and after years of working in this manner, the subliminal choices being made start to make more and more sense.

My methods of acquisition are largely based on emotive and thoughtful responses to the objects and compositions I find in my surroundings. Objects that are semiotically loaded with information are the kinds of things that I choose for the purpose of triggering memories, thoughts, and connections among them. My sculptures are made of several different objects so that there can be many entry points through multiple specific objects to make sure that there is something that nearly everyone will recognize or be seduced by. To use Giorgio Agamben’s terminology from his book *Nudities*, I work with spectres:

“Spectrality is a form of life, a posthumous or complementary life that begins only when everything is finished. Spectrality thus has, with respect to life, the incomparable grace and astuteness of that which is completed, the courtesy

⁵ Bazon Brock, “Cheerful and Heroic Failure,” in *Failure* (London: MIT Press, 2010), 181.

and precision of those who no longer have anything ahead of them.”⁶

The found objects that I use have lived a life already, and now the grace that they possess from achieving completion is brought to the fore. With *Thank god I have an Electrolux* (fig. 15), the vacuum has lived a life that, considering the history of Electrolux, likely involved being used by the housekeeper of an upper-middle class family. This life is of no interest to me during construction; the posthumous life, the life that is thoroughly composed of potential due to its aimless completion, is the life that interests me. The torn and tattered sun umbrella is beyond its functionality as a provider of shade. However, as a posthumous form, it resembles a satellite dish while being a sound recipient for cascades of flowing plastic. What kind of story does a sculpture made of an extension cord, vintage vacuum, spray painted street cone, sun umbrella, yarn, and liquid plastic tell when put together as they are? What have they become? What is this new thing composed of decontextualized/recontextualized things saying? These are the kinds of questions that go beyond the original life of the objects for an interpretation of the sculpture -- they discuss the posthumous life that is taken over by the objects that make up each piece.

The wrinkles in the resin are effects of pouring the material while it is on the precipice of solidifying, causing the outer layer to become somewhat rigid while slightly less viscous material flows beneath the skin. This wrinkling causes the resin to be far less glossy, but rather shows a history of the process as well as the material qualities themselves, giving the pour the character--like the objects intrinsically have--that it strives for, but can never *be*. Resin as a material can only be what it is applied to or cast from, it is formless on its own and thus is dependent upon the things that it interacts with as well as the process by which it is used. By pouring the resin while it is semi-cured, causing long, viscous drips as well as wrinkles and puddles, the material is

⁶ Giorgio Agamben, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of Living among Spectres,” in *Nudities*. trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 39.

imbued with a history of its process while it immerses the objects upon which it is applied. In some ways, this coating dominantly reinforces the history of the objects upon which it is applied (*Pencil Dick* (fig. 1)) by merely holding them in place. In other ways, this history is almost entirely eradicated through dozens of coats of resin (*Good night, sweet prince* (fig. 2)) disguising and abstracting the objects to a point of transcendence; these objects both hold the history of their original life, but they also are imbued with a new history in relation to the other objects composing the sculpture in which it resides. In both cases, the objects in question are recontextualized amongst other things that have been treated identically. When such disparate objects are permanently fused together, they take on the life of the conglomerate and emphasize it more than their previous history.

Historically speaking, intuitive works and narrative-laden works are in stark contrast to one another (Rachel Harrison v Rauschenberg's Combines). Contemporarily, however, these ideas do not need to be mutually exclusive or even at odds with each other. The process of making a sculpture does not *need* to have the intent of a specific narrative, for, considering our entrenchment in object culture where "the idea of the readymade has been so absorbed that an object from life is as obvious a material for art as oil paint,"⁷ a narrative will come to be when trying to decipher compositions whose components are quotidian.

In regards to monumentality, unmonumentality, and how I use them, the piece *Guaranteed 5 Years* (fig. 3) is of a monumental scale, but it is composed of and pinnacled with the unmonumental. Old trunks and saw horses stacked up tower over the viewer, and at the top of this steeple is an oil can with a honey dipper pouring deep blue resin rich with fine gold glitter over an oil can. These spectres are unmonumental, but through formal qualities like scale as well

⁷ Laura Hoptman, "Going to Pieces in the 21st Century," in *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century* (London: Phaidon, 2007), 134.

as recontextualization, they can become monumental. This unmonumental becoming monumental through recontextualization is evident in the work by Michael Heizer, *Levitated Mass* at LACMA, which is a colossal boulder resting over an obtuse trench that visitors are welcomed to walk through and stand beneath the immense weight. However, this recontextualization to become monumental only results in being ultimately unmonumental because it is profoundly disappointing. The stone is supported by, and bolted to, steel struts that are incorporated into the concrete walls it “rests” upon; the monumental feeling is nulled.

The rebellion of Rat Rod culture and West Coast Art are the driving forces behind the work; pushing boundaries, questioning the status quo, and embodying freedom as best it can. Although the Rat Rod culture is intrinsically rebellious, it still abides by fairly strict rules; it must be weathered, it must be stripped to bare essentials, it must place style above safety, it must be loud, it must draw attention to itself. These vehicles, as grotesque as they can be, are still active and viable parts of automobile shows as they are more meant to be seen than to be driven. My works take from the traditional gallery presentation of an object a wall or on a pedestal and skews them; *The spitting image of my father* (fig. 6) with its dirty plywood pedestal, one corner dressed with blue painter’s tape; *Good night, sweet prince* (fig. 2) which holds itself up upon the skin of drips that once coated a pedestal; *Guaranteed 5 years* (fig. 3) which sits atop a ten foot tall pedestal of saw horses and trunks; and *Grate* (fig. 14) utilizes a canvas hung on the wall but the objects in front of it resist that tradition by breaking the frame of the painting and protruding into space. These works ascribe to accepted methods of presentation on their own terms. They only reside within the white cube of the gallery because they are best suited to the conversations that are prevalent within the gallery system. *Making Sense of Nonsense* wants to be interpreted, discussed, and debated because those types of discussions are how we understand one another.

Explaining what a piece means to you and articulating how and why it means what it means is deeply revealing of both the character of the viewer and the potentiality of the work itself.

Dave Hickey's essay *The Birth of the Big Beautiful Art Market* is the most heavily influential essay on my work; the idea that "in the beginning was the Car, the Car was with Art, and the Car was Art"⁸ to me, brings forth ideas that functionality is secondary to style. I find nothing wrong with functional objects as my background is in functional ceramics. My issue lies with functionality as a necessity in fine art; I find it to be superfluous. Function in contemporary art is almost entirely bound to the making of a profound statement on, or trying to change, contemporary life/society. During construction of each sculpture, the function of each object is entirely irrelevant. Of course, once completed, these histories of functionality are inescapable; however, the way in which my sculptures operate is through an amalgamation of semiotic connections, which results in an abstract understanding of the composition as a whole. Which is to say that each individual object is readily readable, but as an object itself, the sculpture becomes an aggregate of meaning stemming from the specific understanding of each component. I find that the profundity lies within the captivation of the viewer. The curious and continuous interest is where the profundity resides; not explicitly with the content, but with the form as well because, in my work, the content of the work is preceded by the form.

These assemblages of loaded materials take from and build upon the concepts of DaDa, Arte Povera, Robert Rauschenberg's Combines, and the neo-avant-garde, though they deviate from each in a different way. I ascribe to the DaDaist usage of readymades to start a line of questioning aimed at art and society, but my divergence lies in their lack of seduction and disregard for aesthetics just to say explicitly that these artworks are *saying something*. Similarly, I cannot fully support Arte Povera artists' usage of readymades often juxtaposed with raw

⁸ Hickey, *Air Guitar*, 61.

materials with the specific intent of discussing ephemerality in an almost existential manner because it was simply a reaction to the emotive, intuitive works of the Abstract-Expressionist artists. However, my work uses that same methodology of recontextualization, just with an intent of blending intuition and critical thought. Rauschenberg used similar strategies with his Combines, but he intended to get at content through juxtaposition instead of narrative through particular construction, which are not mutually exclusive ideas--at least not anymore. Language is fluid, intents change, art movements shift, concepts merge, so claiming that a narrative cannot have content or that content cannot lead to a narrative is antiquated. Rauschenberg did use his intuition to construct his works, but he did so with a knowledge that the objects he chose and composed were loaded with enough social information to be read and re-read. Benjamin Buchloh, the head of the neo-avant-garde discussion in the 1980's, stated that, "...the reading of these neo-avant-garde works consists exclusively in assigning meaning to them from what traditional discourse would call the outside, that is, the process of their reception..."⁹ I agree with Buchloh, but I also feel like that is how all art is read; the viewer can be given information about the work, but ultimately, they are the ones who assign meaning to the work. All of this leads to a placement of my work under the sub-subcategory of the "neo-neo-avant-garde" as Laura Hoptman calls it in her essay "Going to Pieces in the 21st Century."

However, in terms of where I place myself in an art historical context, I must quote Clement Greenberg: "...the whole history of art is there to demonstrate the futility of rules of preference laid down beforehand: the impossibility, that is, of anticipating the outcome of aesthetic experience,"¹⁰ and although I disagree with Greenberg on most of his claims, here I find him to be poignant and contemporarily relevant. The outcomes of aesthetic experiences are

⁹ Hoptman, *Unmonumental*, 134.

¹⁰ Clement Greenberg "Abstract, Representational, and so forth," in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 134.

in a constant state of flux, especially with our rapidly changing technological advancements and access to information. This is most definitely not to say that the rules laid down beforehand are not relevant or should not be studied, but rather that an understanding of the rules is necessary to challenge them and thus, progress the conversation. I simply do not know exactly what category or subcategory I fit under anymore because there are just far too many of them and it feels irrelevant; I work to learn about my predecessors and contemporaries so that I can expand upon their questions and methods.

Artistic Influences

“I am interested in investigating the ways in which aesthetic value and meaning are created and assigned, by both the artist and the viewer. These artifacts are representations of that exploration.” - Tom Duimstra.

Like Duimstra, I have questioned expectations and values of objects/things with my works. However, my sculptures are much less minimal than Duimstra’s works on the grounds that I construct my work to have several specific entry points than a couple of ubiquitous ones. While Duimstra’s objects are often a single industrial material altered and abstracted to give the form new content, I assemble discarded objects to activate individual components, building upon the simplicity of each object. This is especially true with the smaller works as they have far less components, allowing more potency for each individual object in a composition. In a work such as *The key to the city* (fig. 9), composed of a large key, a meat hook, and a fine metals ladle bound in golden resin and backed by a puddle of dark shimmering resin, the individual objects have more poignance as there are far fewer connections to be made among four objects than in a piece like *Pencil Dick* (fig. 1) which contains over a dozen.

To continue on the idea of minimalism with a shift to more West Coast style, John McCracken’s work has been important in the long run of my work. Over the years of living in Los Angeles, I saw plenty of McCracken’s work at various museums, galleries, and collections, but I never felt that they had directly impacted my studio practice until recently when I realized how much I was drawn towards a finish-fetish style that was heavily entrenched in the Light and Space movement. The mentality of that Southern California movement was focused so intently on the superficial that they made the superficial into something that had content in itself; they put meaning to something that was inherently only surface deep. My work takes from McCracken

and this movement the interest in materials that, through their transparency and reflectivity make the relationship between the object and how it is received sensorily at the vanguard of the content. I enjoy the way McCracken speaks about his work, saying that, “my works are minimal and reduced, but also maximal. I try to make them concise, clear statements in three-dimensional form, and also to take them to a breathtaking level of beauty.”¹¹ However, my work does not have a breathtaking level of beauty, and it does not seek to be breathtaking; it seeks to be between minimal and maximal by taking from and utilizing both languages--the language of formalism that has moved beyond minimalism, and the language of beauty and seduction that is inexorably subjective.

Paul McCarthy’s incessant questioning of institutions, authority, and social conditioning are things that I have done since middle school. Religious school positions children in the role of Believer or Skeptic, and I found myself in the latter designation. This skepticism leads to incessant questioning, even to the point of not wanting answers, but merely to ask more questions. The irony that McCarthy has in his work is one method of questioning, as it is said by Lisa Le Feuvre in *Strive to Fail*, “while speculative thought strives for ever-deepening levels of understanding in the search for content, irony asks questions, not to receive an answer but to draw out of content and form yet more questions.”¹² I hope for the connections among objects, forms, and colors in my work to inspire a line of questioning about histories, functionality, and potentiality not strictly through irony, but also through a banal curiosity. When making or reading art, I am not interested in the impetus of the work or what questions it answers. Instead, I consider the potential discussions and questions it could bring forth; in other words, I never think of where the rabbit hole began, only how deep the rabbit hole goes. Due to the semiotically

¹¹ “John McCracken,” David Zwirner Books, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://davidzwirnerbooks.com/artists/artist/john-mccracken>

¹² Lisa Le Feuvre “Strive to Fail,” in *Failure* (London: MIT Press, 2010), 15.

loaded materials with which I construct my works, this skepticism, this doubt, this line of questioning and effort to decode the imagery presented is nearly guaranteed. For example, *Is the plural of abacus “abacuses” or “abaci”?* (fig. 7) could be read as a discussion of waterboarding due to the ironing board and the overflowing mouth of the container at its head, or as a slimy salesman due to the genuine snakeskin loafers, or a weekend bowler trying to pick up a spare due to the bowling pin, or an extraneous debate on the correct suffix for the plural of “abacus” from the title itself.

Jessica Stockholder’s *Kissing the Wall* series, particularly those at the Hauser Wirth & Schimmel exhibition entitled “Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947-2016” in Los Angeles, has an inquisitiveness that I attempt to embody within my own work. Found objects, fluorescent lights, fabrics, and pours of color to tie objects together both physically and ephemerally are all methods I strive to employ. In the site specific exhibition “Door Hinges” at Kavi Gupta Gallery, Stockholder used a large patch of deep purple carpet that laid on the floor with one corner adhered to the wall; this is the kind of transcendence in material history that acknowledges and pays homage to the life it once had that I try to capture in my assemblages.

Chris Burden’s ability to take mundane things to a level of absurdity fuels my interest in his work. Monumental things can become mundane after enough exposure and desensitization; in the same way, mundane things can be recontextualized to reach a level of monumentality. The method by which that monumentality is achieved, for Burden, at least, is often through absurdity. Pieces like *Big Wheel* and *The Flying Steamroller* are two prime examples of this absurd and tense, yet soothing and mesmerizing effect of his work. *Big Wheel* is composed of an eight foot diameter, three ton wood and metal wheel, and an old motorcycle to power it; the motorcycle

propels the wheel to about 60 miles per hour, and then disconnects from the wheel, letting it whirl on with the knowledge that any flaw with the structure would be catastrophic. On a less monumental level, I feel that my work has mesmerizing and absurd moments. However, my work does not aim for monumental scale, but rather it aims to be unmonumental and mundane. “This [unmonumental] aesthetic is not so much a style but rather an “attitude,” as curator Anne Ellegood appropriately noted in ‘The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas,’ her 2006 exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. It is a set of strategies and tensions, a fluid definition of sculpture that understands itself not as a self-sufficient, complete form but rather as a receptacle, an intersection of disparate materials and images.”¹³

John Chamberlain’s piece *Shortstop* is resonant for me as it uses automobile parts that have been crushed, warped, and altered to create an assemblage of color, form, line, and narrative; he adamantly denied and rejected the reading into his work that was done by critics, stating “my work has nothing to do with car wrecks.”¹⁴ However, I must side with Roland Barthes on this particular topic and argue that “the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination.”¹⁵ The usage of automobile fenders crushed and warped together tells a story of the American Dream being riddled with failures and futility. The futility and mystery of the previous life of the objects that I repurpose is something that perpetually draws me to them. In a similar way to Chamberlain’s expansion of Abstract Expressionist gesture and intuitive construction to a place where the origin of the objects was woven into the core of the

¹³ Massimiliano Gioni “Ask the Dust,” in *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century* (London: Phaidon, 2007), 65.

¹⁴ “John Chamberlain,” The Art Story, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-chamberlain-john.htm>

¹⁵ Roland Barthes “The Death of the Author,” in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 148.

structure, I create three dimensional renderings of action paintings. This is not to say that all action painting or Abstract-Expressionist works possess narrative, but rather that nearly eighty years since the inception of the Abstract-Expressionist movement, Art has evolved to a point where narrative can be read into works that are focused on process and material histories without being reduced to “narrative” or “process” oriented work; these two categories are not mutually exclusive, and due to this fact, works that focus on semiotic readability that have been constructed without the consideration of the specificity of the read but rather the guarantee of that readability are entirely valid.

I have also been heavily influenced by Christian Tedeschi, one of my former professors. His usage of ubiquitous materials like shopping carts and plastic, understanding of form, and poignancy are things that I have been working towards in my graduate experience. Works such as *Pewb*, *Five Miles/Steak Knife*, and *Organ* have all impacted me in such a way that I push my understanding of materials, assemblage, and the idea of being metaphorically knocked out by a feather. Granted, my work does not reach the same level of efficiency, but I aim for the essence of those ideals while maintaining a sense of self.

During my undergraduate studies as a ceramics major, I was enamored with the ceramic works of Ken Price. The shift away from traditional finishing methods of glazing to adding hundreds of layers of automotive paint that were sanded down and polished to create a glasslike marbled finish was something that resonated with me both in terms of challenging tradition and seducing the viewer. Although in a very different way than Price, my work has levels of seduction and aims to challenge ideals and understanding.

Conclusion

Through this written thesis, I have disclosed information about my past, my thoughts and methodologies on art, and my understandings of the world to which I have been exposed, which I hope has given some level of clarity and credence to my work--it has for me. Ultimately, I am a formalist sculptor that wants to understand the people and the world around me through conversations triggered by semiotically loaded, visceral, seductive sculptures.



Figure 1. *Pencil Dick*. 2017. Bucket, ladder, toaster, “Dick” pencil holder, squealer, whip, triathlon baton, pez dispenser, push broom head, speedometer, high heels, sugar cube tongs, butt plug, yarn, glitter, resin. 36”x28”x66” Photo by author.



Figure 2. *Goodnight, sweet prince*. 2017. Basil container, large clothespin, vessel, taxidermy duckling, spray paint, teeth, glitter, resin. 16"x18"x59" Photo by author.



Figure 3. *Guaranteed 5 Years*. 2017. Saw horses, trunks, horn, bell, oil can, honey dipper, spray paint, glitter, resin. 50"x48"x134" Photo by author.



Figure 4. *EH. 2017*. Speaker stand, golf ball collector, object, router case, skewers, thermometer, drum stick, automobile mirror, golf balls, speedometer, strainer, yarn, spray paint, sticker, glitter, resin. 28"x56"x75" Photo by author.



Figure 5. *It's a flashlight, NOT a vibrator*. 2017. Marble end table, garden tool, folding yardstick, f-clamp, table saw attachment, container, lucky rabbit's foot, flashlight, candle holder, monofilament, thread, yarn, glitter, resin. 22"x46"x73" Photo by author.



Figure 6. *The spitting image of my father*. 2017. California raisinette, spittoon, broken glasses, rubber band, angel candle snifter, plywood, blue painters tape, glitter, resin. 7"x7"x16" Photo by author.

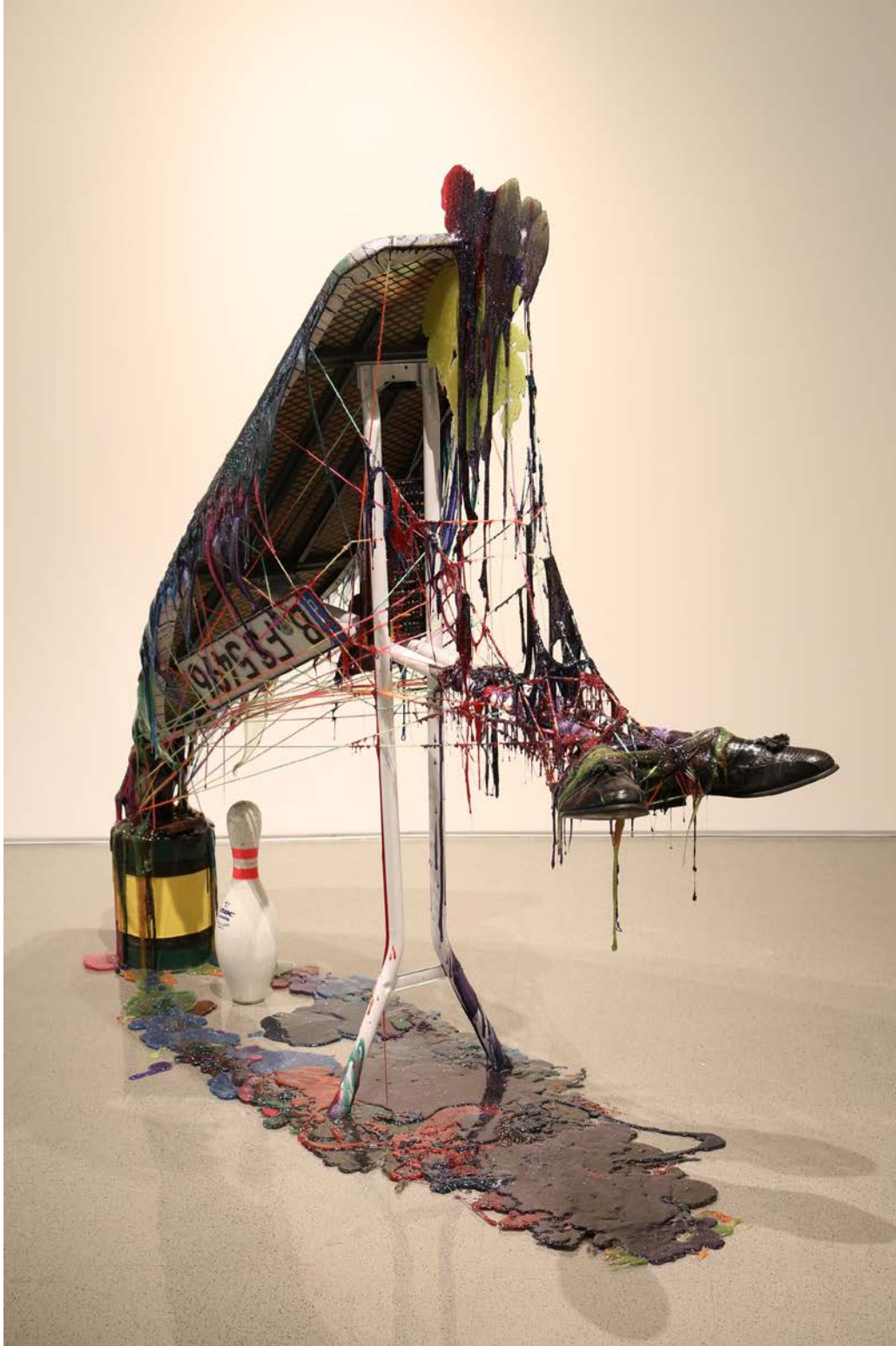


Figure 7. *Is the plural of “abacus” abacuses or abaci?* 2017. Ironing board, genuine snakeskin loafers, container, another container, bowling pin, abacus, missouri license plate, german license plate, yarn, glitter, resin. 27”x80”x57” Photo by author.



Figure 8. *Night bright*. 2017. Small pot, oil lamp, oxygen/acetylene torch, spray paint, glitter, resin. 5"x9"x10" Photo by author.



Figure 9. *The key to the city*. 2017. Key, meat hook, fine metals ladle, spray paint, glitter, resin. 17"x26"x8" Photo by author.



Figure 10. *Spritz*. 2017. Hatchet, cheese grater, oil can, pearl necklace, spray paint, glitter, resin. 10"x12"x17" Photo by author.



Figure 11. *Vaguely Texas*. 2017. Cheese grater, automobile emblem, raccoon skull, panel, canvas, spray paint, glitter, resin. 14"x17"x4" Photo by author.

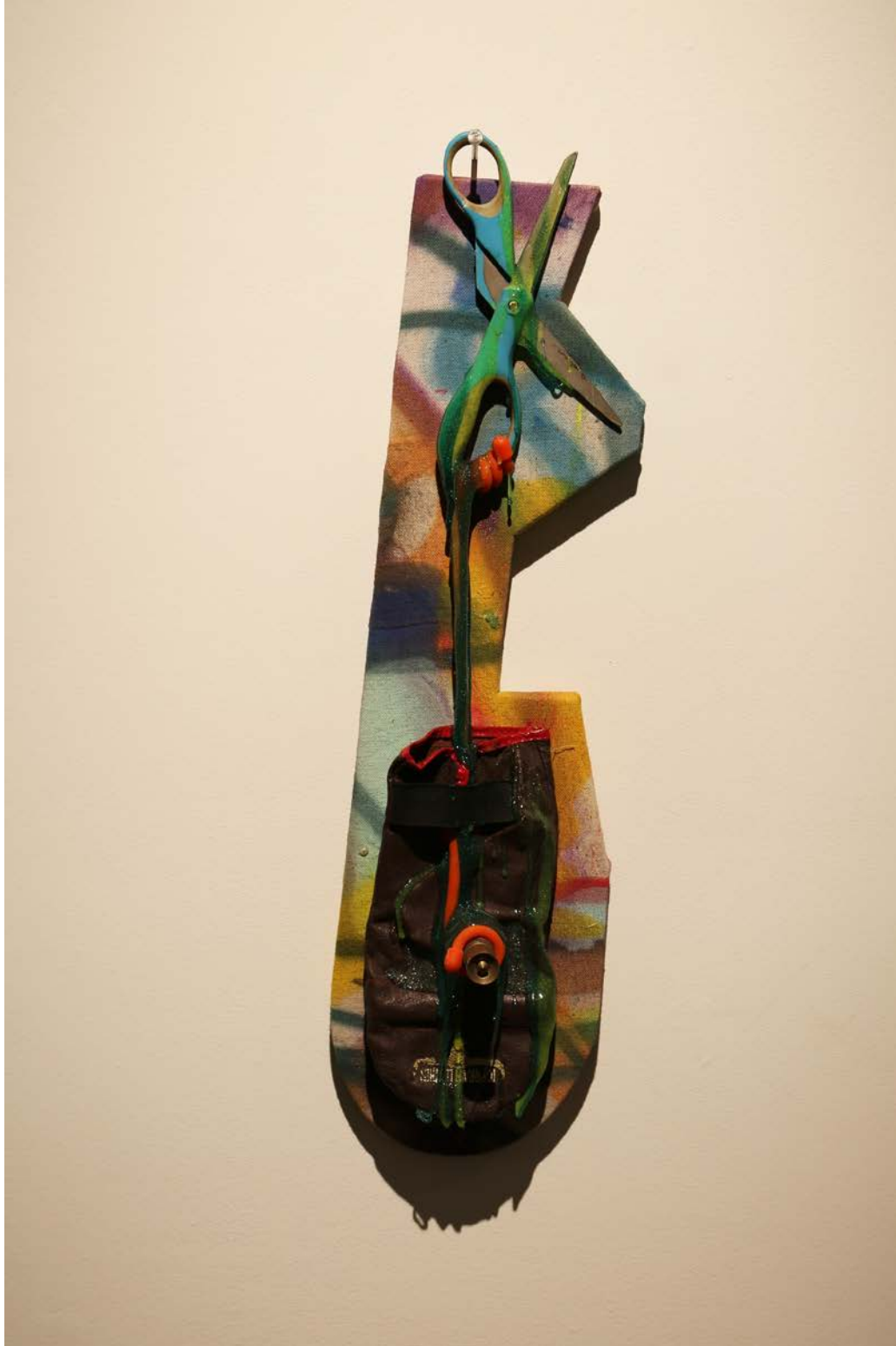


Figure 12. *Everlast*. 2017. Scissors, hardware twist tie, boxing glove, hose tip, panel, canvas, spray paint, glitter, resin. 7"x27"x5" Photo by author.



Figure 13. *Grasp*. 2017. Tongs, salt and pepper shakers, thread, panel, canvas, spray paint, glitter, resin. 11"x25"x4" Photo by author.



Figure 14. *Grate*. 2017. Hack saw, flint striker, grate, panel, canvas, spray paint, glitter, resin. 14"x20"x6" Photo by author.



Figure 15. *Thank God I have and Electrolux*. 2017. Vacuum, street cone, tools, sun umbrella, ratchet strap, yarn, resin. 32"x32"x64" Photo by author.

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